Cigarette smoke from the previous night hung in the air. There were also faint traces of shoe disinfectant and lane oil. The cook in the back of the attached restaurant was in the beginning stages of making pizzas for the busy evening that approached, while kids sauntered in through the front doors. A few of them were glued to the claw machine, throwing in dollar after dollar of the ten their parents had given them for vending machine snacks. Reluctantly I swung open my mom’s car door, said a short good-bye, and meekly made my way through the side door.

Waiting in line at the front counter, I couldn’t understand why all of us would choose to spend our afternoon this way - bowling. From three o’clock to five o’clock every Tuesday and Thursday, I was here throwing a bowling ball down a lane, eating Cheez-its, spinning around in the chairs until it was my turn again, and constantly glancing back at the door searching for my mom. At the front of the line I softly told the cashier my shoe size, grabbed the locker key, and picked up my shoes. The only good thing about bowling was my Scooby-Doo bowling ball. It was deep blue, almost black, dusted with sparkles that resembled stars in the night sky. Scooby-Doo’s bright orangey red icon stood out just enough to be noticeable from a lane down, but not enough to make a statement. I opened my own locker, which hadn’t been updated since the late 80’s, and muscled the bowling ball off the green carpet and into my arms.

I walked along the cosmic carpet to my lane, keeping my head down, paying close attention to the bright pinks, yellows, oranges, and blues on the floor. They popped out against the jet black, but I didn’t delight in the color scheme because it was Tuesday at 3:15 and I had to bowl to keep busy after school.

I put my size eight-and-a-half shoes on, and carried my ball down to lane 14. I always thought there was less pressure on the outside lanes. Our group of three players logged each other’s names onto the scoreboard, pressed enter, and began. Frame after frame I found my Scooby-Doo ball, waited for my opponent to finish, lined up in the center of the seven guide dots on the floor in front of the lane, and launched the ball towards the worn, off-white pins. After returning to my seat, I checked the time, ate a few Cheez-its and sat quietly until I was up again.
Watching the screen change from a harsh blue to black, I was one step closer to the peace, quiet, and comfort of my house. This was game two of the three games we were required to bowl, and it was usually at this point that the crash of the bowling balls against the pins and loud chatter from kids on surrounding lanes started to give me a headache.

The screen changed again from black to an unflattering burgundy for game three, and I started to search anxiously for my mom at the front doors. Two more frames to go and I would be home free. On the tenth frame I tried not to bowl a strike or spare in hopes of finishing earlier than my fellow bowlers. I quickly un-velcroed my shoes, returned my ball to the locker, and turned in our scorecard. Finally, my mom was here to drive me home and save me from my headache. I swung the front doors wide open as I strolled out of the bowling alley, knowing I would have to return two days later.